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ABSTRACT

A study used the Reading Retelling Profile to examine the effectiveness of the holistic instructional approach called "reading workshop," which involves increased time for sustained silent reading, authentic literature in the reading program, a choice of books to read, written response journals, group discussions, and a supportive literary environment. Subjects, 23 fourth-grade students of average reading ability, were instructed using the reading workshop approach 2 days per week for 8 weeks, supplementing regular basal instruction. Subjects' comprehension was assessed using written retellings analyzed using the Reading Retelling Profile, and subjects' attitude toward reading was assessed using the Warncke Attitude and Interest in Reading Inventory. Subjects in the control group, 13 fourth-grade students of average reading ability from another school in the same district, were instructed using the same basal series and completed the written retelling and attitude survey. Results indicated that: (1) the experimental group demonstrated a higher degree of comprehension as measured by reader's response to text than did the control group; (2) text-based comprehension information and written language use demonstrated no significant difference between the two groups, although the experimental group demonstrated higher posttest means in text-based comprehension information; and (3) the experimental group showed improvement in reading attitudes, while the control group showed decline. (A figure presenting the Reading Retelling Profile and one table of data is included; 18 references are attached.) (RS)

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Effects of Reading Workshop on Students' Retellings

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Effects of Reading Workshop on Students' Retellings

One of the challenges that reading researchers face is that of finding comprehension assessment instruments that adequately reflect the theoretical premises of new instructional approaches. It makes sense to use assessments that are compatible with the instructional method. Given the growing popularity of holistic and naturalistic reading instructional approaches (such as literature groups and integration of content areas with reading instruction [see Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989]), there is a need for holistic reading comprehension assessment instruments that provide insights into the comprehension processes readers employ.

This paper presents a study about a new holistic instructional approach called Reading Workshop. First introduced by Atwell (1987), this method of instruction reflects a theoretical view of reading as process. However, to examine the effectiveness of this approach, a process-oriented assessment tool was needed. To meet this need, the instrument chosen for assessing reading comprehension was written retellings analyzed by the Reader Retelling Profile (Mitchell & Irwin, In progress). The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the

Reader Retelling Profile can be used as an assessment in a research setting. In this study, the Reader Retelling Profile was used as an instrument to examine the effectiveness of Reading Workshop.

Reading Workshop is an instructional framework wherein teachers design lessons and create a literary environment that supports, motivates, and challenges readers (Atwell, 1987). Regular, extended periods of time for silent reading from a wide selection of children's literature, as well as opportunities to respond to the readings in writing and in discussions are provided in Reading Workshop.

With this approach students are allowed to select their own books, and if there are multiple copies of the same book available, several students can choose to read the same book. Often a favorite book is read by several in the class over the course of a year.

Reading Workshop begins with a teacher-designed mini lesson that may focus on such topics as how to choose a good book, what to write about in the response journal, tips for reading aloud, different genres, favorite authors, and elements of literary works. These lessons are unlike the skills and drills found in many basal-guided lessons. Following an extended period of

silent reading, Reading Workshop concludes by bringing the teacher and students together to share responses, ask questions, and bring closure to the workshop (Atwell, 1987).

Reading Workshop is based on a transactive view of the reading process which holds that the construction of meaning is the result of a simultaneous and ongoing exchange among reader, text, and context (Goodman, 1984; Rosenblatt, 1978). What is important according to this perspective of reading, is that meaning is not merely contained in the text, but rather meaning is created by the continuous exchanges that occur during (and before/after) the reading event.

The practices that make up Reading Workshop come from various sources. Research on the interrelatedness of reading and writing, the role of interaction in learning, the use of children's literature in reading instruction, and a process writing approach called Writing Workshop have all contributed to the development of Reading Workshop.

Research on the interrelatedness of reading and writing has shown that both processes involve the construction of meaning (Rubin & Hansen, 1984; Tierney &

Pearson, 1984). This relationship is important to Reading Workshop because it emphasizes that meaning is not fixed in the text, but that it is continually being created as students read, reflect, and write their responses in a journal.

Class or small group discussions about books are also important to the meaning making process in a Reading Workshop. Although each reader may interpret the text one way during a private reading, talking with others who have read the same book sometimes confirms, but other times extends or modifies individual interpretations and helps students <u>together</u> create a richer understanding of the text (Galda, 1983; Golden, 1986). Although students in Reading Workshop may not be reading the same books, the opportunity to discuss and answer questions about what they have read, still has much the same effect (Atwell, 1987).

Building upon the success of Writing Workshop (Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1983; Walshe, 1983), Nancie Atwell developed a Reading Workshop based on the same guidelines as the Writing Workshop (Atwell, 1987). According to Atwell, readers need ample time to develop fluency and learn the value of reading. They also need

choices in reading to suit their needs and interests, and opportunities to share responses and learn from other readers in a supportive literary environment. She reported that her students improved in reading ability and demonstrated better attitudes toward reading as a result of Reading Workshop (Atwell, 1987).

Similar observations about the success of Reading Workshop have been reported by other teachers using this approach (Five, 1988; Frew, 1990; McWhirter, 1990). They report that students who had been bored and passive became avid readers who wrote comments in their journals such as, "This book was so good I wish I could read it forever." (Five, 1988, p. 107).

In order to measure the effects of Reading Workshop on readers' comprehension, students were asked to read a story and write one retelling before and one after the treatment period. Retellings were evaluated according to the Reader Retelling Profile which is divided into three domains: reader's text-based comprehension information, response and reactions to text, and language use (see Figure 1).

The first domain of reading comprehension examined in this profile is meant to assess how well the readers

understood the main ideas presented in the text and how the readers were able to connect the details supporting those main ideas. A high rating in this first aspect of reading comprehension indicated that the readers were able to comprehend and recall the author's meaning as contained in the text. It is called text-based comprehension information because its purpose is to gauge how much of the author's meaning the reader was able to carry away from the text.

The second domain of reading comprehension examined in the Reader Retelling Profile is meant to assess the readers' ability to connect their cultural backgrounds, experiences, prior knowledge and the immediate purpose for reading to the text. A high rating in the reader response section of the profile indicated that readers were actively engaged in negotiating meaning with the text. Readers' response to text reflects the unique and necessary contributions of readers in reading comprehension.

Written language usage is the third domain of reading comprehension examined in the profile. The readers' use of language reflects not only a linguistic comfort level, but also a level of comfort and confidence

with the details, main ideas, and interpretations expressed in the retelling. Well organized retellings indicate that the readers are confident in their interpretations of the text, are comfortable with their personal responses to the reading, and have made decisions about the importance of certain key details and ideas to include over other less important facts.

This instrument seems appropriate for evaluating the effects of a Reading Workshop approach to teaching reading comprehension. It is compatible with the theoretical premises of Reading Workshop. The Reader Retelling Profile allows researchers to examine reading comprehension from the perspective of the reader as well as from the perspective of the text. In addition, since it provides an avenue for examining many different aspects of reading comprehension, the Reader Retelling Profile is sensitive to change. It allows the researcher to examine changes brought about by individual choice in selecting books, reflection in a response journal, and discussion about books.

Although the positive effects of Reading Workshop have already been described (Atwell, 1987; Five, 1988; Frew, 1990; & McWhirter, 1990), these reports did not

include systematic measurement or quantification of the effects of Reading Workshop through the use of assessment instruments. Nevertheless, by using an appropriate instrument such as the Reader Retelling Profile, Reading Workshop can be examined in an experimental fashion. Additional investigations examining Reading Workshop from an experimental paradigm are needed before comparative statements about the effectiveness of Reading Workshop over another reading instructional approach can be made.

This study moves toward an experimental design in an attempt to control for random differences among students, teacher differences, and instructional approaches. A quasi-experimental design was used to systematically investigate the effects of a twice-weekly Reading Workshop on fourth grade students' reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading.

In order to use this type of research design, a reading comprehension assessment instrument that could be examined for reliability (while still adhering to the important theoretical premises of Reading Workshop) needed to be used. For that reason, written retellings were used to assess reading comprehension. Because the researcher also wanted to know if Reading Workshop would

have a positive effect on attitudes toward reading, a modified version of the Warncke Attitude and Interest in Reading Inventory (WAIRI) (Warncke & Shipman, 1984) was used to assess attitude toward reading.

Given increased time for sustained silent reading, authentic literature in the reading program, a choice of books to read, and a supportive literary environment, gains in reading comprehension and improvement in attitudes toward reading were expected.

Method

Subjects

Two fourth grade classes from the same school district participated in the study. One teacher volunteered to set aside the basal-guided reading program two days a week in order to accommodate the Reading Workshop treatment. This experimental group was comprised of average ability readers, as determined by teacher judgment. The total number of students from the experimental group that were included in the retelling and WAIRI analyses were 22 and 23 respectively. There was some missing data due to absence.

The control group, from a different school, was

comprised of both average and low ability readers as determined by teacher judgment. Only scores from the average ability readers were used in the analysis. The total number of students from the control group that were included in the retelling and WAIRI analyses were 13 and 12 respectively. This group also had some missing data due to absence.

Both teachers taught from the same basal series, used the workbooks, unit tests, and other supplementary materials in much the same way. It was established through teacher interviews and direct observation by the researcher that reading instruction in both groups was similar, although the teaching styles and personalities were different. The time devoted to reading instruction in both classrooms was about 60 minutes each day.

In the experimental classroom the researcher conducted the Reading Workshops, which replaced the basal-guided instruction two days a week. The control group received basal-guided instruction five days a week. The researcher had only limited contact with the control group. In all, the researcher made contact with the control group about six times, administering all the pretests, observing a reading class, interviewing the

teacher informally, and administering the posttests.

Design

The question addressed in this study was whether fourth graders who participated in Reading Workshop would show a greater improvement in reading comprehension and a more positive attitude toward reading than fourth graders who did not participate in Reading Workshop, but received only basal-guided instruction.

To investigate the effects of Reading Workshop on reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading, analyses of covariance were employed with the independent variable being group (experimental or control), the dependent variable being the posttest, and the covariate being the pretest. This design provided an F-test ($p < .05$) for each of the adjusted posttest mean comparisons. The purpose for using the pretest as a covariate was to increase the power of the statistical test. No significant pretest differences were found between the groups on any of the dependent variables.

Teaching materials and procedures

Following the pre-tests, the control group

continued with their usual method of reading instruction five days a week, for about eight weeks. The experimental group began participating in Reading Workshop two days a week while they continued work in the basal series the other three days a week. The researcher conducted each of the workshops; the classroom teacher provided the basal reading instruction.

Reading Workshop began with a mini lesson that took about 10 minutes. The lesson was followed with 20-30 minutes of silent reading and time for writing responses in journals. The workshop was concluded with a sharing session. In all, the workshops lasted from 50-60 minutes.

Students read books that they had selected from home, the school library, or from boxes of books provided by the researcher. Books provided by the researcher were paperbacks borrowed from the public library. These books reflected a range of interests and reading difficulty to suit the needs and desires of the students.

A written response journal was also kept by each student. The journal entries were used to reinforce mini lessons, record responses to reading, and to stimulate group discussion.

The treatment period lasted approximately eight weeks, for a total of 16 Reading Workshops. Posttesting in experimental and control groups followed the treatment period. Students completed another attitude survey and wrote another retelling for post-treatment scoring just as in the pre-testing.

Testing materials

Reading Comprehension. Written retellings were used in order to measure changes in reading comprehension. A written retelling is a post-reading activity in which students write as much as they can recall from the text. Retellings were used to measure changes in reading comprehension because they not only indicate what readers recalled from the text, but also what they regarded as important and how they chose to reorganize the story in their retelling (Irwin & Mitchell, Manuscript submitted for publication 1991). Pre- and posttest retellings were scored according to the Reader Retelling Profile developed by Mitchell and Irwin (In progress). This profile is sensitive to deep processing such as readers' affective involvement with the text, readers' attempts to apply learnings from the

text to the real world, and attempts to connect background knowledge with text information. When a retelling included aspects such as these, it was called a "rich" retelling.

The stories used for the written retellings were selected from a third grade basal reading text that was not being used in the district. This was done to assure that the students had not already read the test stories. A third grade series was selected so that the story would be within the independent reading level of the students. Two stories at approximately the same interest and difficulty level were used for retellings, one for the pretest and the other for the posttest. Both stories were about children who needed to solve a problem, both stories were approximately the same length, and both stories were at the same readability level.

Attitudes. To measure changes in attitude toward reading a survey was constructed by the researcher. It was adapted from the 1984 Warncke Attitude and Interest in Reading Inventory (WAIRI). A five-point scale was used to quantify students' attitudes toward reading. The survey included statements to agree or disagree with such as: "I'd rather go out to play with my friends than

read." "I enjoy going to the library to read and borrow books." "I wish I had more time to read."

Testing procedures

Before beginning Reading Workshop all groups were pre-tested on reading comprehension and attitude toward reading. The researcher administered each of the tests. Before students were asked to write a retelling, the researcher modeled the process. The students practiced written retelling independently and then some discussion and clarification of retelling followed. Finally, once the researcher was confident the students all had a fair opportunity to learn to retell and understand the criteria for a good retelling, the students read a new story and provided a written retelling for scoring, which served as the pretest for the study.

The attitude survey began with five practice questions that were designed to teach the students how the answers should be marked. Discussion during this time was encouraged. Students answered the remaining 15 questions silently on their own copy of the survey. The researcher read the questions aloud to ensure that everyone understood.

Data analysis

Prior to investigating the primary questions of the study, the internal consistency of the attitude survey was analyzed using Cronbach alpha coefficient (1960) as an index of reliability. Reliability coefficients for the attitude survey were .83 (pretest) and .85 (posttest).

Three raters determined whether each retelling reflected a high, moderate, low, or no degree of performance for each criterion judged in the profile. Interrater reliability was determined by computing the Pearson Product Moment Correlation between domain scores resulting from each pair-wise combination of raters. Based on these correlations, the rater with the lowest reliability coefficients was discarded and the domain scores from the remaining two raters averaged. Average interrater coefficients for each of the domains were .74, .76, and .69 respectively.

Results

The first reading comprehension domain assessed by the retellings was readers' text-based comprehension information. As indicated by Table 1, no significant

difference between the adjusted posttest means of the two treatment groups was found. The second domain of the Retelling Profile measured reader response. A significant difference between the adjusted posttest means of the two treatment groups was found for this domain. The Reading Workshop group demonstrated a higher degree of reader response than the basal-guided reading instruction group. No significant differences between the adjusted posttest means of the two treatment groups were found on the third section of the retellings measuring written language use.

To measure changes in attitude toward reading, students completed an attitude survey. As shown in Table 1, there is a significant difference between the adjusted posttest means of the two treatment groups. The Reading Workshop group demonstrated a better posttest attitude toward reading than the basal-guided reading instruction group.

In summary, students who participated in Reading Workshop twice a week demonstrated higher comprehension as reflected in readers' response to text than the control group. There were no differences in comprehension for the text-based or written language use

aspects of the Reader Retelling Profile. The Reading Workshop students also demonstrated more positive attitudes toward reading on the posttest than did the control students.

Discussion

The effects of Reading Workshop on the many aspects of reading comprehension explored through the Reader Retelling Profile indicate that the treatment was beneficial. The Reading Workshop group demonstrated a higher degree of comprehension as measured by reader's response to text than did the control group.

There are several possible reasons why this occurred. Throughout the mini lessons and during discussions, Reading Workshop students were encouraged to find connections between the readings, their past experiences, and their feelings. The active role of the reader in questioning, organizing, and making the reading meaningful was emphasized. One entire mini lesson focused on the nature of reader response; how different types of genre evoke different responses, how authors craft a story or poem to evoke laughter or tears. The combined impact of the mini lessons, discussions with

other readers, and writing a response at the end of each workshop seems to have paid off in the reader response domain of reading comprehension. Furthermore, it is fortunate that the assessment instrument used to analyze the retellings took reader response into consideration. This finding highlights the importance of using an appropriate and sensitive measurement instrument.

Results for text-based comprehension information and written language use demonstrated no significant difference between the two groups. Nevertheless, the Reading Workshop group did demonstrate higher posttest means in text-based comprehension information. No significant differences in these two aspects of reading comprehension indicates that a twice weekly Reading Workshop is not inferior to daily basal-guided instruction and that teachers can use the Reading Workshop approach without undermining achievement in reading comprehension.

It should also be noted that with the low interrater reliability on the last domain of reading comprehension assessed in the profile (written language use) it was less likely that significant results (even when present) would be found. This problem with the

lower interrater reliability of written language use emphasizes how important it is to train the raters carefully.

As expected, Reading Workshop was most effective for improving attitudes toward reading. Whereas attitudes toward reading in the control group deteriorated from pretest to posttest, the Reading Workshop group showed an improvement in attitudes. Improved attitudes toward reading might be explained by factors such as more time to read, individual choice in books read, many books to choose from, opportunity to discuss and share books, the satisfaction of reading a whole book for the first time, and the newness of a Reading Workshop approach to reading instruction. Knowing that he could choose to keep or return the book he had just taken out of the box, Morgan said, "I started to skim it [the book], then I got into it." The power to choose their own books in combination with more time to read them was probably the most important factor in improved attitudes toward reading for those students involved in Reading Workshop.

Implications

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate how the Reader Retelling Profile could be used as an instrument to examine the effectiveness of Reading Workshop. The results of this study investigating the effects of Reading Workshop indicate that this method of teaching reading has much to offer classroom teachers and their students. This study is incomplete, however, in that it leaves some questions unanswered.

Could the differences between the Reading Workshop group and the control group be explained by the teacher variable? Unfortunately, this study did not control for teacher differences by including more teachers. Nevertheless, information about the backgrounds, perspectives on reading instruction, and experience of the teachers involved in the study might have been helpful in evaluation of the findings. Similarly, more descriptive information about the students might lend additional insights.

What would have happened had the control group received the mini lessons given to the experimental group but not the time to read, respond, and discuss allowed for in the Reading Workshop group? Proponents of Reading

Workshop would argue that time to read, respond, and discuss are crucial to the success of Reading Workshop, and that the mini lessons are an integral part of this approach.

Could the differences between the two groups be explained by the novelty of the Reading Workshop treatment and the introduction of a new teacher (the researcher) into the experimental group? Obviously, that threat persists.

One of the most interesting problems presented in this study is that of time for independent silent reading. Given the importance of time to read, how could it be that within only eight weeks any significant results were found? Although they are desirable results, they are surprising. More time should have been given to independent silent reading in a study about Reading Workshop. Nevertheless, students participating in Reading Workshop showed greater improvement in some aspects of reading comprehension and better attitudes toward reading than the control group. Such dramatic results, achieved in so little time, indicate that Reading Workshop is a powerful intervention. Had the intervention occurred over a longer period of time, it is

likely that even greater effects would have been observed.

Although not all of the results of this study were statistically significant, the opportunity for students to reflect, discuss, respond, and write about books had a positive impact on those students involved in Reading Workshop. This was documented through direct observation of and conversations with students, written responses in the students' journals, and interviews with teachers.

The good news about the assessment of reading comprehension is that the Reader Retelling Profile was able to highlight the effects of Reading Workshop in a quasi-experimental setting, this despite the limitation of time. Thus, this instrument shows real potential as a holistic evaluation tool to assess holistic methods of reading instruction.

Figure 1

Retelling Profile*

Directions: Indicate with a check (✔) the degree to which the reader's retelling reflects the reader's comprehension in terms of the following criteria:

	None	Low Degree	Moderate Degree	High Degree
1. Retelling includes information directly stated in text.				
2. Retelling includes information inferred directly or indirectly from text.				
3. Retelling includes what is important to remember from the text.				
4. Retelling provides relevant content, concepts, and context.				
5. Retelling indicates reader's attempts to connect background knowledge with text information.				
6. Retelling indicates reader's attempts to make summary statements or generalizations based on the text and apply them to the real world.				
7. Retelling indicates reader's highly individualistic and creative impressions of or reactions to the text.				
8. Retelling indicates reader's affective involvement with the text.				
9. Retelling demonstrates reader's language fluency (use of vocabulary, sentence structure, language conventions, etc.).				
10. Retelling indicates reader's organization or composition abilities.				
11. Retelling demonstrates reader's sense of audience or purpose.				
12. Retelling indicates reader's control of the mechanics of speaking or writing.				

Interpretation: Items 1-4 indicate reader's text-based comprehension information;
Items 5-8 indicate reader's response and readtions to text;
Items 9-12 indicate reader's language use.

*from Mitchell, J.N. & Irwin, P.A. (1991). The reader retelling profile: Using retellings to make instructional

Table 1
ANCOVA Summary Table for
Reading Comprehension and Attitude Measures

		Unadj. Posttest Group Mean	Adjusted Group Mean	F	Probability
Text-Based Comprehension information	Reading Workshop	7.91	7.96	1.41	0.24
	No Reading Workshop	7.25	7.16		
Reader's Response to Text	Reading Workshop	4.23	4.21	10.50	0.003
	No Reading Workshop	1.38	1.42		
Written Language Usage	Reading Workshop	7.25	7.32	0.36	0.55
	No Reading Workshop	7.83	7.70		
WAIRI Attitude Survey	Reading Workshop	46.83	47.56	4.54	0.04
	No Reading Workshop	42.77	41.47		

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